

# Alumni News



If there has ever been a true Renaissance man in the history of The United States Air Force Band, it has to be Red Brower. Born William S. Brower in Dayton, Virginia, in 1916, the 85-year-old Brower remains to this day an individual of infinite curiosity, coupled with the dexterity and creative abilities to bring his visions to reality.

He is a self-taught draftsman, who, by 1950, had risen to the position of Aircraft Armament Test and Research Engineer in the Navy Department working at the Washington Navy Yard. Red had been the bass soloist for several years at Eldbrook Methodist Church in Washington, when new Air Force Lieutenant Bob Landers, who was the director of the Singing Sergeants, became the choir director at the church.

In a short time, Brower was faced with new challenges in the Air Force, which meant, for him, new triumphs. The USAF Band had just completed its first major post-war tour to Europe, and the instrument cases simply couldn't take the pounding. So Brower designed all new cases — and then built them. He was immediately put in charge of the Band's equipment on tour, and while, over the next 20 years, there were a few instances when the musicians were late for or even missed a concert, the equipment was always there!

Since the loading and unloading of aircraft was part and parcel of the Band's extensive touring, Red became a loadmaster *par excellence*. He also managed to change the standard military footlocker into things like the conductor's tour podium, speaker cases, audio wire reels, etc.



In Germany, 1955. Brower is on the right.

When the Band first toured Japan in 1956, Red became fascinated with Bonsai, and to this day his plants are a marvel of beauty, artistry and patience.

In the mid-50s, he designed and built his family's new home on Waterway Drive in Lake Barcroft, Virginia. While he went to a pre-cut homes company in Leesburg, Virginia (at that time, the only one in the Metro area) for his walls, the order was strictly his — "I'll take wall 'C' from your Plan 14, wall 'E' from your Plan 6" and so forth. After the foundation was poured (he helped) and the roof and siding were in place, Red did virtually everything else himself. When it was time to landscape the heavily wooded lot, there was more creativity: azaleas, day lilies and a naturally designed waterfall and pond. But he also wanted walkways and a patio that would be unique.

At that same time, the Washington Navy Yard was tearing down one of its' machine shops, the floor of which had been covered with wood approximately 1 1/2" square and 6" deep. Since it had been soaked with oil over the years, it was virtually indestructible. The oil brought out the wood's grain to perfection, but the entire floor was going to be thrown away. Red "did them a favor" by hauling the blocks away, and 50 years later the patio and walkways are still in wonderful condition.

When the first noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the Singing Sergeants, Ivan Genuchi, decided to transfer to the USAF Academy Band in 1960, Red took over the job and held it until his retirement in 1971. This meant that he had the "joy" of being NCOIC when the membership increased "overnight" from 20 to 40 members in 1962 — and crashed from 40 to 13 less than two years later!

While working as a stagehand at the Kennedy Center in the first years of his retirement, he met a fellow go-getter, Pat Mitchell, who within a few years had formed National Scenery Studios in Newington, Virginia, where Red became the "Jack of all Trades." Specializing in fabulous designs for industrial shows,



Red Brower in 1958

Las Vegas extravaganzas and Broadway musicals, Pat would call on Red when the rest of the staff was stymied.

By 1995 it was time for Red's second retirement. Not long after, he and Maybelle — they celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary last August — sold their home in Falls Church. It was tough to give up the home with so many personal touches. For example, in the basement Red had constructed a gorgeous stone fireplace, with rocks from every state in the Union. He had personally collected these on his travels with the Concert Band and Singing Sergeants, and brought them back in footlockers.

They moved to a townhouse in the retirement community in Solomons, Maryland, where they have "the most fantastic wood shop you have ever seen." Speaking of wood, if you want to experience Brower the artist, drop by the lobby of the Red Cross Headquarters Building at Route 50 and the Beltway in Virginia and be dazzled by his wood sculpture. While it stands six feet high, Red describes it as "18 feet of bent wood." It's breathtaking. He also has his own kiln for his ceramics designs. The gardening bug is still with him, and now he specializes in cross-pollinating and raising his own species of day lilies.

— CMSgt (ret.) Harry Gleeson